

MINNESOTA FWP NEWS

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Hopes and Possibilities

Winter 2004

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Group picture taken at the Federal Women's Program committee meeting on January 14, 2004 by Sonia Jacobsen.

Back row: (L to R): Gloria Larson (HR staff), Richard Laddusire (Advisor), Steve Cole, Leah Moore, Susan Glende, and Bill Hunt (State Conservationist).

Front row: (L to R): Tessa Garcia (HEPM), Karen Mueller, Brenda Tonn, Sandy Jerzak, Larissa Schmitt (A3-alternate), and Ann English (Assistant State Conservationist-Operations)

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Federal Women's Program Mission:

The mission of the Minnesota Federal Women's Program is to provide information on NRCS employment and career advancement opportunities to professional series, discuss issues and barriers women/men are facing and to devise solutions to these barriers.

Goals:

- ❖ Increase women numbers in the professional series of employment in MN NRCS through recruitment and retention.
- ❖ Increase concentrations of women in multiple-interval occupations by promoting cross training, employee development and other opportunities.
- ❖ Promote educational programs and activities such as Women's History Month, Diversity Day and Women's Equality Day. The Minnesota FWP committee will ensure that all programs and activities are made available to both women and men.
- ❖ Publish a Minnesota FWP newsletter annually addressing work and family issues that face all NRCS employees.

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Below: Nationally recognized speaker, author and consultant – Catherine Jewell.



Ms. Jewell has 25 years She has 25 years of experience in marketing, advertising and management. She speaks at conventions on “Inspiring STAR Performance”. To obtain her free newsletter, please visit her website: www.jewellspeak.com

Articles submitted by Karen Mueller

How hard is it, *really*, to produce STAR performance?



With so many ordinary performers around us, we can become STARs simply by doing a few things better. Here are some more ways you can upgrade your performance to STAR level:

Keep track of commitments. When you make or receive a verbal promise, be sure to write yourself a note. You will set yourself apart as a STAR if you consistently know who promised what, by when.

Do it now. STAR performers are doers. All of us have complex jobs, and it's easy to lose track of what needs to be done. Instead of having an elaborate list of tasks, try to handle things quickly as they come up.

Set aside time to follow-up. After every business meeting or phone session, there are little tasks that either have to be done or scheduled. You can impress your boss, coworkers and clients by quickly providing what you promise.

Be consistent in your organization. Most professionals have a way of keeping appointment and contact information. They have a filing system. But, we often “get behind” and don't use the systems we've created. Whatever your system, use it consistently. Make it simple enough so that you don't have papers, files and notes piling up. Treat your own system as “the rule” and continually refine it to save time and energy.

Speak well of everyone and everything. Mom said: “If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all.” Good advice. If you find the good in everyone and everything, you will stand out as a positive person who attracts good things into your life. It's easy to be the critic and much harder to offer positive ideas. Try to see the upside and you will notice that things actually improve.

In order to get something you've never had, you need to start doing things you've never done.

Identifying Your Talent by Catherine Jewell

People don't know themselves very well. It's amazing, but if you ask a professional what their primary talents are, they will look at you blankly. I suspect this is because we are taught from an early age to deflect compliments. This false humility prevents us from knowing how we appear to others. We don't know what we're truly good at because we try to hard to be “normal,” and “just like our friends.” Talent is what separates us from others, and many of us are uncomfortable with that separation. Yet, talents are the key to success. So, how can we identify our talents? Here are five ways:

Pay attention to compliments. Most of us have one or two outstanding talents that are “remarkable.” Listen to the good things people say about you and to you about your performance. Rather than deflect compliments, keep track of them. Today, create a folder in your computer called “Compliments.” Start saving emails with compliments. Start writing notes to yourself when you hear something positive about your work.

Keep a portfolio of your accomplishments. It's a good idea to keep an employment file on yourself. One way to document your progress is to keep a log or resume of your recent accomplishments. Even if you stay in the same job for the rest of your career, this file can show year-to-year improvement. Save samples of your work, if you have visible evidence. Keep brochures and newsletters you write; save the program for the Awards Banquet you planned—in short, anything that will be a reminder of your achievements.

Use your portfolio to spark your memory for performance evaluations. Instead of leaving it all up to your supervisor, you can point out your achievements. Keep all the documents your Human Resources department might keep about you:

Dates of employment
Educational certificates
Written suggestions
Job titles, dates
Project summaries
Job descriptions

Awards
Letters of recommendation
Congratulatory memos/emails
Salary history
Reports

Notice what comes easily for you. When you are actually enjoying your work, what is it that you are doing? What if you could do more of that? When I first spoke to a large audience, I experienced a rush of pleasure. At that moment, I understood what I was meant to do. From that time forward, I directed all my career efforts into perfecting my speaking skills and trying to get more of that work into my life.

Notice who you are for others. My nephew is the “fix-it” man at work. When there is a problem, big or small, coworkers bring him the mess. He is known as the person with patience to work through a problem and solve it. When there is a complex task, involving regulations, rules or other details, he is the one who sorts it out and makes sense of it all. He fixes problems and creates processes. How do you serve those around you?

Notice what you volunteer for. If you are the one who always plans the parties at work, that is significant. You are the host, the organizer. You obviously have both the desire and the talent to pull it off. Not everyone can do this. Your voluntary tasks tell a lot about who you are and what you have talent for.

Let it in. You might want to discount what you do well and say, “Anyone could do that.” Stop that urge and take in the special qualities that are you. Your talents define who you are. Notice them and build your career about your talents.

What is a Flexible Spending Account?

By Leah Moore

The New Year not only brings new resolutions but it brings important choices impacting you and your family. We have to decide if we want to stay with our current health care plan or change to a new one. We have to decide if we want to increase or decrease the amount of money we contribute to our Thrift Savings Plan. Now we have a new choice.

A Flexible Spending Account (FSA) is a tax-favored benefit that lets you use pre-tax dollars from your paycheck to pay for expenses not covered by your Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) plan. There are two types of FSAs available to federal employees who are eligible to participate in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP). They are the Health Care Flexible Spending Account (HCFSAs) and the Dependent Care Flexible Spending Account (DCFSA). The following article will discuss the Health Care Flexible Spending Account (HCFSAs) and how it can help you manage the cost of health care for you and your family.

The best place to find information about HCFSAs is at the following website: <http://www.fsafeds.com>. I have found the website to be very helpful and easy to use. It contains several useful tools, such as the Savings Calculator and the Top Ten Questions page. Julie MacSwain, Public Affairs Specialist in St. Paul, has found the FSAFEDS Benefit Counselor phone hotline to be a great way to talk to a representative about certain aspects of the program. The hotline phone number is 1-877-FSAFEDS or 1-877-372-3337.

There are several different reimbursement options available through FSAFEDS. You can either sign up for automatic reimbursement, if you use a participating FEHB plan, or you can file a claim using the claim form available on the website. I signed up for the automatic reimbursement since Blue Cross Blue Shield is a participating FEHB plan and have been very pleased so far. You can find out if your FEHB plan is a participant on the FSAFEDS website or when you enroll in the program. With automatic reimbursement, your out-of-pocket expenses are automatically deposited in your account.

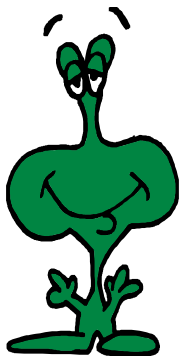
There are several key facts to remember about participating in HCFSAs.

- ☐ There is NO cost to the participant to enroll in HCFSAs.
- ☐ HCFSAs are pre-tax, which saves you money in the long run. To calculate how much you can save, work through the Savings Calculator on the FSAFEDS website.
- ☐ The money you allocate to HCFSAs will be paid directly to you, not to your doctor.
- ☐ You do not have to have the full allotted amount in your HCFSAs before you can submit a claim if you are an active participant in the program.
- ☐ You may not change the amount of money you allocate unless you have a Qualified Status Change.
- ☐ If you do not use all the money you have allocated to your HCFSAs, that money cannot be rolled over or refunded to you. It is very important to look at your health care budget and allocate the most approximate amount you think you will need over the year.
- ☐ The maximum amount you can allocate to HCFSAs is \$4,000 per year and the minimum annual allocation is \$250.

The open season for FSAFEDS is the same as the open period for FEHB. The next open season is from November 10, 2004 to December 15, 2004. If you would like more information about FSAFEDS, please take a look at www.fsafeds.com.

When Obstacles Get You Down ...

Positive thoughts and actions lower stress and boost your efficiency.



- *Keep your sunny side up.* When mishaps occur, react with optimism. Find a silver lining and emphasize it.
- *Set an example.* When others see your selfless acts, they will be uplifted and will strive to mirror your behavior.
- *Find humor in sadness.* Appropriate humor will help you stop moping so that you can focus on positive action instead.

Power Tools

For Women



Joni Daniels identifies many of the power tools we have within ourselves. Where are your strengths and what can be improved on to become more confident in your own abilities. I have two video tapes available: presently one is in Area 1 and one in Area 5. Handouts for the seminar are available at http://www.ssi.nrcs.usda.gov/publications/4_Misc/MI005_PowerTools.pdf

Sandy Jerzak, FWPM

Earth Care Connection – Connecting Women in Conservation www.earthcareconnection.org

Federally Employed Women – FEW www.few.org

Federal Women's Program – www.usda.gov

Ann Bancroft Foundation supports girls and women to realize their highest dreams and potential. This organization provides minigrants to girls grades 6-10 to achieve a dream. Visit www.annbancroftfoundation.org

STEPS- Science Technology Engineering Preview Summer camps. This is an opportunity for girls to explore science and engineering topics. Eligible for girls completing 6 grade and going into 7 grade. www.sme.org

Linking Girls to the Land - Building Partnerships with Natural Resource Conservation Agencies and Girls Scouts of the USA. <http://www.epa.gov/linkinggirls/resguide.html>

FWPM Recognized Richard Laddusire

Sandy Jerzak, FWPM, recognized Richard Laddusire, former Human Resources Manager, on February 12, 2004 for being the FWP advisor for three years. She handed him a Certificate of Appreciation and a Terry Redlin coffee mug.

Best wishes to Richard in his new position in New Jersey.



Picture taken by Sonia Jacobsen.

At a conference for Women in Agriculture, women were asked what workshops would be most beneficial to farm/ranch women; falling second only to stress management was **understanding government farm programs**.

*Forty six percent of farmland acquired by women is inherited, versus only 19 percent for men.

*The areas with the highest percentage of land owned by women are in the Midwest and Plains States.

How to reach out to women customers

Research shows that the agricultural sector relies heavily on personal contacts and "word of mouth". Women are very social and have involvement in various community-based groups.

- Provide a seminar or workshop in partnership with other agencies and conservation partners: MN Extension, Master Gardeners, Watershed based groups, 4-H clubs, Estate Planning forums etc. (BERBI-Land Stewardship Opportunities for Women Landowners Conference, Breckenridge Ladies Night Out, and SW Women's Day.)
- Give a presentation to women church groups, corn/soybean growers meetings, livestock group meetings, etc
- Suggest a one-on-one meeting at their farm

Information taken from the SSI: Technical Report Release 3.2 (August 1998) Women in Agriculture: Changing Roles and Current Outreach Techniques.

Federal Career Survival Strategies

Getting that promotion or career change takes on a well planned marketing approach to get the "best qualified" status and ultimately the job.

The federal resume and KSA's are your marketing piece, career summary, and personal presentation. This in fact can be considered your first interview that you have control over the answers. The forms should be carefully focused, well-written, clearly organized and professionally presented career package that can help you earn promotions as you select your jobs, education and training.

Writing Effective KSA's in Ten Steps

1. Pick your announcement wisely.
2. Read the KSAs and associated instruction very carefully.
3. Brainstorm several detailed examples for each KSA.
4. Select two examples for each KSA.
5. Start writing the opening.
6. Write the two examples.
7. Include keywords.
8. Write the ending.
9. Edit your writing.
10. Proofreading carefully

Visit www.federaldaily.com/jobs/index.htm for more careers strategies and products that are available for purchase.

LEAD

FOLLOW

Or

GET OUT OF THE WAY

HBO premiered "**Iron Jawed Angels**", a recounting of the struggle of suffragists who fought for the passage of the 19th Amendment. The film portrays Alice Paul and Lucy Burns courage, intellect and tenacity that pushed the boundaries of political protest to secure women's voting rights in 1920. Contact Sandy Jerzak at the Marshall Area office if you wish to check out this video tape.

Did you know

Before the 19th Amendment was ratified in the U.S. in 1920, women already had the right to vote in these countries:

New Zealand in 1893
Australia in 1902
Mexico in 1917
Russia in 1917
Germany 1918
Canada in 1918

BECOME A MENTOR – A mentor is a "trusted , loyal advisor." A mentor is an individual that is experienced and who helps and guides another individual's development. *Please consider.*

Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover. ~Mark Twain

Midwest Leadership Program

By Colleen Oestreich

The Midwest Leadership Program is an opportunity for NRCS employees to develop their management skills, network with other future leaders of the agency and gain exposure to current leaders who are recruiting to fill vacancies within their state. This is a GREAT program, especially if you are looking to expand your options.

NRCS decided to be proactive to the expected turnover of top management in the agency. The Midwest Region developed the Leadership Program and is now a model for other regions. It begins with a four day, orientation session in Madison, WI. Here participants discover themselves through a personality test called Kieseey Temperament. There were presentations from Midwest NRCS staff covering accountability, KSA preparation and Farm Bill updates. Participants also split into groups to plan the Washington DC trip.

The first Washington DC trip comes next. This is another four days of presentations and activities. We met Chief, Bruce Knight, most of the NRCS Deputy Chiefs and some select NRCS partners. This is a crash course on what is happening with NRCS. Participants have the opportunity to ask questions, provide feedback from the field perspective and tour DC.

LDP participants are also expected to complete a special project. I chose to focus on organic agriculture. RC&D partnered with MN Dept of Agriculture to host organic agriculture training sessions for resource professionals. I assisted with the grant proposal and implementation.

Participants have a budget of approximately \$5,000 to complete the training sessions and any other capacity building activities they work into their action plan. I was able to attend the Operations Management training for State Level Program Managers.

Bill Hunt is a strong advocate for the program. LDP folks were able to attend some of the MN State Leadership meetings. We are also often asked to take advantage of "Acting" opportunities within the state to broaden our experience.

The Capitol Hill Workshop will be the second Washington DC trip for LDP folks. This session provides an overview of the political aspect of our careers. The major parties were represented along with Ralph Nader of the Green Party.

Finally, there is a graduation celebration. Indiana hosted ours. A few special projects are highlighted, graduates receive a special award and network again with State Conservationists from the Midwest. I would encourage NRCS staff to apply for the program. It is worth the effort!

The Federal Women's Program strongly encourages everyone to consider this training opportunity. Mr. Hunt has approved every applicant that submitted her/his request. If there is a problem with eligibility requirement, please make it known to your supervisor and we can see if the restriction can be waived.

The Importance of Women Understanding Politics and Getting Out To Vote in 2004

Submitted by Karen Mueller

The voices of 36 million women are usually heard and respected by most professionals, however, not politicians. Ever. The biggest reason is they don't get out and vote.

Nancy Bauer, professor from University of Pennsylvania, is trying to get women to participate in the 2004 election by making it easy to understand the election process by setting up a non-profit non-partisan website that helps women stay in the loop about political issues.

Often women feel disconnected when it comes to politics because they think they are not well informed. This is where www.womenmatter.com/theloop.htm will help women make the process easy, accessible and to the point.

Women constitute 52% of the population so women voters do make a difference.

If you have not registered to vote, click <http://electionimpact.votenet.com/womenmatter/> and register in your state.

To read more about Nancy Bauer and how important it is for women to get out and vote in 2004, click on Grand Forks Herald website <http://www.grandforks.com/mld/grandforksherald/living/8042826.htm>

Finally, if you have young children in your family, take them down to the polls with you when you vote. This will set a good example by showing them what democracy is all about and how important each vote counts.